

Caribbean Area Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) Ranking information for Fiscal Year 2005

The Caribbean Area will rank all applications according to the following factors (EQIP rule language is denoted by quotation marks.) A brief statement of how these items have been addressed in the state ranking, allocation, or policy follows each item.

1. "The degree of cost effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices." Local workgroups considered the cost effectiveness of practices when assigning priority to the practices. Additionally, state policy specifies that certain practices are only to be used when they are the most cost effective to the government practice to address the resource need. The final step in the ranking criteria includes a cost effectiveness calculation where total project cost (not contract cost) is divided by total environmental benefits points so those contracts that are more cost effective will rank higher (low score is better.) Additionally, several practices have cost-share limits and several have variable cost-share rates.

2. "The magnitude of the environmental benefits resulting from the treatment of National Priorities and the priority natural resource concerns reflecting the level of performance of a conservation practice." The Caribbean Area ranking criteria is based on practice selection, it is important to understand that the practices were selected and prioritized based on a number of factors including how they address resource concerns. The natural resource concerns that are treated address the EQIP national priorities as listed in the EQIP Final Rule, specifically the national priorities concerning water, soil and wildlife. All of the practices eligible for EQIP address one or more of the national priorities.

3. "Treatment of multiple resource concerns." This factor gives priority to practices that achieve multiple resource conservation benefits. The prioritization of practices considered the treatment of multiple resource concerns, and those that would most likely treat multiple concerns, were ranked as a higher priority, thus, contracts which include those practices will most often rank higher than those which include practices which may only address single concerns. Additionally, bonus points are given in the ranking to contracts which include multiple practices, (higher points for multiple high-priority practices) which will address (in most cases) multiple resource concerns. Only practices which are truly needed to address a resource concern is to be included in contracts. Selecting practices just to gain points when the practice is not needed is not allowed.

4. "Use of conservation practices that provide environmental enhancements for a longer period of time." Applications implementing cost effective practices that provide environmental benefits for a longer duration should end up ranking higher than similar applications with shorter benefit duration conservation practices. In most cases, this will result in optimizing environmental benefits. Additionally, planners are instructed to encourage the use of cost-effective practices that will provide long-lasting environmental benefits.

5. "Compliance with Federal, State, local, or Tribal regulatory requirements concerning soil, water, and air quality, wildlife habitat, and ground and surface water conservation."

Where identified, practices that will help producers meet regulatory requirements, and/or reduce the potential for future regulations were prioritized higher. One of the primary regulatory issues that farmers face in the Caribbean Area has to do with animal wastes.

6. "Other locally defined pertinent factors, such as the location of the conservation practice in relation to an environmentally sensitive area, the extent of natural resource degradation, and the degree of cooperation by local producers to achieve environmental improvements." Local work groups take locally defined pertinent factors into consideration when identifying natural resource concerns and the practices (and their priority) needed to address them.

The Caribbean Area ranking worksheet takes into consideration environmentally sensitive areas, such as impaired streams and water bodies, wildlife issues, where other ongoing programs or efforts may be leveraged, etc. when determining the financial assistance allocations to each pooling area.